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The INQUIRER

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Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

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General Assembly of the Unitarian and
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2017 GA Resolutions

Resolution 1

In view of the tragic news of the bombing of two Coptic Churches in Egypt on Palm Sunday, 9th April 2017, this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, meeting now in Birmingham, extends its deepest sympathy to the families and friends of the over 41 Coptic Christians who died, and to the Coptic Pope and churches of Egypt, the United Kingdom and around the world. In the words of Hans Küng, to the International Association for Religious Freedom: "There will be no peace in the world, until there is peace among religions. There will be no peace among religions until there is dialogue among religions."

Resolution 2

That this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches supports changes to the length and format of the Annual Meetings [as set out in report AGM13/17]; and therefore, requests the Executive Committee and Annual Meetings Panel to bring forward proposals to the next Annual Meetings, including any amendments to the Constitution and By-laws, to enable such changes to take place for future Annual Meetings

Resolution 3

That this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches recognises the considerable contribution of Rev Cliff Reed to the Unitarian cause worldwide by naming him as an Honorary Member.

Resolution 4

This General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches deplores the harsh and degrading treatment of County Durham resident Irene Clennell on 26th February 2017 when she was taken away from her husband and family by the UK Border Agency, held in Dungavel immigration removal centre and then deported to Singapore in the most humiliating manner. This General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches calls upon the Government of the United Kingdom to:

- Immediately reinstate Irene Clennell's indefinite leave to remain in the UK, permitting her to return to her husband and family in County Durham.
- Cease the practice of using obscure technical issues to deport people who have long been fully integrated into British families, thereby subjecting them and their family members to extreme anguish and distress.
- Instruct the UK Border Agency to treat persons subjected to deportation with the utmost care, dignity and respect.

Update: We have made contact with Irene Clennell's sister-in-law, Angela (John Clennell's sister). She is very grateful to have our support. She says that Irene had an appointment with the British High Commission in Singapore for her new application, accompanied by her legal representation. She was told that it would take 10 to 14 days after that for her to get a response to her application. That means that our support and concern has come at a critical time to help Irene's case.

Angela has promised to keep us updated as the situation develops. Meanwhile we would invite Unitarians to support the on line petition (as a number have done already) on change.org See: <http://bit.ly/2qidkkH>

A Parliamentary petition is here: <http://bit.ly/2qi4q79>

Unitarian Chief Officer Derek McAuley sent the resolution to Home Secretary Amber Rudd and made contact with Irene Clennell on Twitter. She appreciates any messages of support on: [@IreneClennell](https://twitter.com/IreneClennell)

– David and Hazel Warhurst, on behalf of Stockton Unitarians.

Correction

In the 8 April issue of The Inquirer, the wrong email address was published for those who would like to participate in the Rev Sue Woolley's survey on faith. The correct address is: revsuewoolley@gmail.com

All are welcome request a survey which covers themes including beliefs about Unitarianism, Unitarian ethos and values, beliefs about the divine, beliefs about Unitarians' relationships with Christianity, beliefs about Unitarians' relationships with other faiths; beliefs about people; and Unitarian spirituality and activities.

President invites a journey of faith

After he was appointed unanimously by the General Assembly, the Rev Charles VanDenBroeder approached the podium with a stuffed chimpanzee named Mugs and placed it near his microphone, announcing that he'd brought his own vice president along. The GA's Executive Committee was unable to decide on a vice president for 2017-8. Instead, three past presidents plan to help.

Charles, who was clearly moved by the appointment, said, 'I would like to thank you all for confirming the EC's choice of me as president of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches for the next 12 months.

'First the bad news. I am not (2016/7 president and long-time Unitarian Activist) Dot Hewerdine! I have known her for close to 30 years now and she has always given 110% – even when it was detrimental to her own health. Dot has set a very high standard indeed.

'Next, the good news. I am a broad-church Unitarian and see squabbles over theology or the lack thereof as distractions from the business at hand – which for me is to be a welcoming spiritual home for all, and to realise that all people are our sisters and brothers and live our lives as such. This means, among other things, to reach out to your local community.

'If you just want to moan, Mugs the chimp will gladly listen to you and not answer back. If you want to share ideas and ask questions of the EC, I am the one to contact.'



Charles VanDenBroeder and his 'vice president' Mugs. Photo by Ed Fordham

A year filled with hope

After a year in office as Unitarian General Assembly president, Dot Hewerdine offered these remarks to the annual meetings delegates.

'Our days are identical suitcases – all the same size – but some people can pack more into them than others.' Words of that prolific writer, Anon!

My year as President has felt like an extended version of that. An identical year pretty much the same size as always, but over-packed for most of the time and sometimes in danger of bursting open and spilling out the contents. And the packing itself required answers to so many questions: Where am I going? How am I travelling? For how long? With what expectations when I arrive? And always, the big one: Have I got the presidential gong safe and secure?

Well, here I am at the end of my year and I have managed to arrive in the right places at the right time with appropriate preparation – and the gong! Though I have to admit that it was a close thing on a couple of occasions thanks to the complexities of one-way systems or the last minute cancellation of booked trains.

How have I changed?

As I have travelled around the UK I have been inspired by the communities that I have visited. Each one unique in its own way. Many are struggling to balance the need to preserve their building with the desire to become more of a known presence in the local community spreading Unitarian values of love and acceptance. I have been engaged in discussions, usually over shared food and maybe the occasional glass of wine, about theology, hymn books, community gardens, Ministry, training, lack of training, buildings, finance, lack of volunteer support, and much, much more. At one of my last engagements I was challenged by the question, 'How has your experience as President changed you?'

Interesting question and well-deserved since almost everywhere I have been I have talked about the need to change, to adapt to demands of the modern world.

(Continued on next page)

Seeking Unitarian convictions

In a short service following his installation, GA President Charles VanDenBroeder offered further remarks.

Noting that at one point in her novel *Fly Away Home*, American writer Marge Piercy has a mother say of her daughters: 'The girls had been raised Unitarian (Universalist), which seemed a nice, sensible compromise between having no religion at all and having to lie about what we believed. Enough religion to be respectable but not enough to get in the way,' GA President Charles VanDenBroeder encouraged fellow Unitarians to go on a journey of faith, to be less interested in discussing the traditions each has discarded and instead ask one another what they believe. He emphasised that as Unitarians we can't believe, 'whatever we want', but instead we believe what we must.

He added: 'There are many Unitarian and Free Christians who have spent precious time and energy proclaiming what they don't believe, which spiritual practices they no longer need, which ethical restraints they refuse to obey and all the forms and rituals they can't tolerate. This discarding of old beliefs is often both necessary and understandable. One needs to discard what one doesn't believe in before one can move on to more authentic beliefs.

'However, I still encounter people within the movement who tend to wallow in this negativity. Fortunately, people are beginning to use that freedom which comes with being a Unitarian and Free Christian to get serious about their beliefs and how to practice them in community.

Being a Unitarian and Free Christian is about much more than the opinions and beliefs you hold. It is about the way you live your life day to day. Our tradition affirms that with authentic religion it is deeds not creeds that count. Our faith asks, "If being a Unitarian and Free Christian were against the law, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"'

Our faith's purpose is not yet fulfilled



2016/7 Unitarian General Assembly President Dot Hewerdine addresses the meetings. Photo by James Barry

(Continued from previous page)

My overall feeling is that most of the people I have met have been engaged at a wider level than their own locality, concerned about the current strangeness of our political world and its effects on some parts of our global communities and anxious to ensure that our liberal faith endures in a world where it is so much needed today and will still be tomorrow.

I have become aware that there are different ways of being a Unitarian and I am not referring to differences in theological thought – it surely is a given that we accept and respect those differences.

Different ways of being Unitarian

But the differences I have noticed are those between those who keep our presence alive, well and making a difference locally and those whose focus is on making a difference in the wider world. Please don't misinterpret – that I favour one or the other. Both are much needed and there are some who somehow manage to be both. It is only when I have sensed lack of respect one to the other that I have felt sadness and frustration.

Stephen Covey said 'There are certain things that are fundamental to human fulfilment. The essence of these needs is captured in the phrase 'to live, to love, to learn, to leave a legacy'. He goes on to say: 'The need to live is our physical need for such things as food, clothing, shelter, economical well-being, health. The need to love is our social need to relate to other people, to belong, to love and to be loved. The need to learn is our mental need to develop and to grow. 'And the need to leave a legacy is our spiritual need to have a sense of meaning, purpose, personal congruence, and contribution'

Surely to belong, to love and be loved, to learn and grow without fear of censure, to be accepted even as beliefs evolve with age and experience, these fundamental human needs can be/are found supported by our Unitarian values in our communities whether local, national or global. I have been engaged with many on the question of 'do we have a future since we now here enjoy the freedom to believe as our consciences dictate?' Has our purpose been fulfilled? Has our time passed?

How can we say our purpose has been fulfilled when we see

evidence that there is not Civil and Religious Liberty throughout the World? Yes, we do still have a purpose. There is still work for us to do. And we have at this time a great opportunity to embrace what this means for us in the future and to ensure that we have both the capacity and the capability to undertake that work.

The Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen wrote, 'A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm.' Ibsen is right. We must all be prepared to take the helm at some time and in some way if we are to leave a legacy for future generations as a community where 'our spiritual need to have a sense of meaning, purpose, personal congruence, and contribution' can be met.

Whether we are at the helm of a small craft moored in our local pond, or a huge ship sailing the oceans of the world, we must all play our part at some point. And, if we do not feel we have the skills to be at the helm, maybe we should reflect on the words of Media Mogul, Ted Turner who said, 'Either lead, follow or get out of the way!'

At the annual meetings we celebrated the gift of service of those who have stepped up to the helm of the General Assembly by committing to guide our ship through sometimes murky waters. I refer, of course, to the members of the Executive Committee. It is a sadness that we seem to be unable to attract people to put themselves forward for this task of leadership. I know the new EC will explore ways of addressing this but, in the meantime, perhaps we can value and respect those who have put themselves forward, offer support in whatever way we can, follow – assuming good intent – and ensure that we are not getting in the way!

Hope for the future

Am I optimistic about our future? I prefer to say 'hopeful'. Barack Obama said, 'Hope is not blind optimism. It's not ignoring the enormity of the task ahead or the roadblocks that stand in our path. It's not sitting on the sidelines or shirking from a fight. Hope is that thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it, and to work for it, and to fight for it. Hope is the belief that destiny will not be written for us, but by us, by the men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is, who have the courage to remake the world as it should be.'

And, yes, I am hopeful for our future. How can I be otherwise after a year of meeting inspiring people, seeing with my own eyes the many and varied activities local, national and global that Unitarians and Free Christians are engaged in; the commitment to making a difference?

Yes, we do have a future so let us continue to do what we can, continuing to sow and nurture seeds for that future, remembering the words of Marjorie Newlin Leaming in 'Rejoice Together':

*Let us go forth into the world
through a door of hope for the future,
remembering these words by Martin Luther:
Even if I knew that tomorrow
the world would go to pieces,
I would still plant my apple tree.*

Dot Hewerdine was Unitarian General Assembly President 2016/7

Honorary membership given to Cliff Reed

John Midgley seconded the motion to make the Rev Cliff Reed an honorary member of the General Assembly.

The criteria for nomination for Honorary Membership are that they are persons who have rendered long and consistent service nationally, and who have thereby made a significant contribution towards the furtherance of the objectives of the General Assembly.

I am quite sure the Rev Cliff Reed fulfils the criteria *and more*. His Unitarian life began as the son of a minister, the Rev Lionel Orlando Reed, who came over from another denomination to become a Unitarian when Cliff was 12 years old. Cliff attended Sunday School and soon grew into membership of the then Unitarian Young People's League. That young people's movement was very energetic, with busy, active branches, regional associations and national events at Great Hucklow and elsewhere; hardworking with work camps, singing and dancing a lot, sharing progressive worship services, challenging the denomination on social justice issues, falling in love a lot, falling out of love a lot, acting in plays, making films and records, making a nuisance of themselves at GA Annual Meetings, attending national and international youth rallies and events, sometimes seen as outrageous, with Cliff very much at the heart of it all, and all based on freedom and love. Wonderful! Those were the days! A good number of ministers as well as laypeople in significant leadership positions emerged from the Unitarian Young People's League.

Obviously, ministry

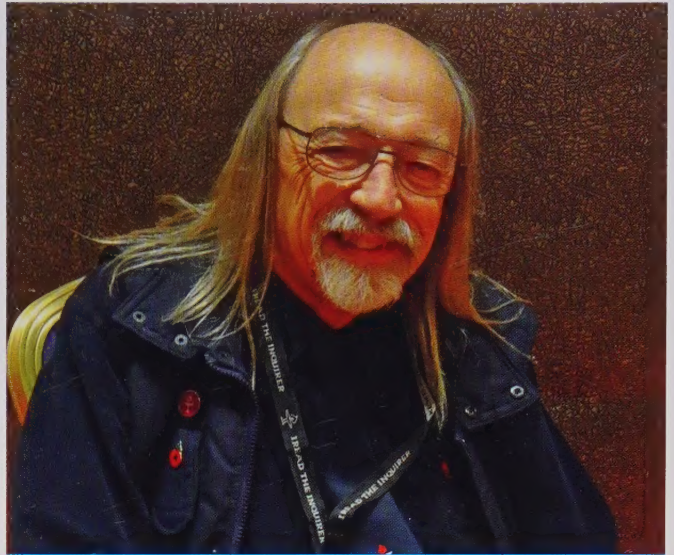
Deciding on a career in librarianship, but then having a change of heart, in 1969 Cliff flew to Guyana in South America with Voluntary Service Overseas, supposedly for two years; but after only a few weeks a road accident and resultant fractured skull landed him back in the UK.

In 1970-72, he worked at Dr Williams's Library in London; he was a member of the notorious Golders Green Unitarians. Along the way, he became friendly with an Essex Hall staff-member called Paulette Walker.

He then made what seemed the obvious move, in 1972, to Unitarian College and Manchester University, training for our ministry and studying theology. In December 1975, a rather unusual 'small ad' appeared in *The Inquirer*. 'Cliff and Paulette finally announce... the purchase of the first ring.' They were married at Golders Green in 1976 and Cliff moved to what was to be his only ministry, at Ipswich with Bedfield and Framlingham (1976-2012). It was long and consistent. On his retirement, the Ipswich congregation conferred on him the honorary title of Minister Emeritus. In addition, he made positive and consistent contributions to his District Association, serving twice as its Chair of the Executive Committee. Along the way his two sons were born, Edmund and Stephen.

He has also made significant contributions to the work of the General Assembly at the national level. He was a member of the Objects Review Commission which produced the first draft of the revised Objects of the General Assembly, even writing a hymn, widely used, based on our objects. Cliff didn't just further the objectives of the General Assembly, he helped to draft them. He wrote the booklet, *Unitarian—What's That?* and nobody knows how many thousands of copies have been sold and distributed.

He preached the Anniversary Sermon in 1995 and served as GA President for the year 1997-98.



On accepting his Honorary Membership in the GA, the Rev Cliff Reed said: 'From disreputable teenager to disreputable septuagenarian, the Unitarian movement has been my life. Thank you.' Photo by Ed Fordham

International connections

A further contribution has been representing British Unitarians in the international dimension. Cliff was one of the founding group of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU), and served as its secretary 1995-1997. He has played a significant part in its life and work, especially in its publications. His ICUU duties took him to India, Canada, the USA, Germany, Hungary, Transylvania, Switzerland, the Czech Republic and Spain, and he has met Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists from many more countries besides.

In 1991 Cliff undertook an exchange ministry at the congregation of (the wonderfully named!) Bloomington Normal in Illinois in the USA. An enriching experience for all concerned. Arising out of this came what perhaps has been the most outstanding contribution to our movement. It was the production in 1992, of Cliff's first book of worship material. Holding the view that worship is the heart of what we are and what we do as Unitarians, and that we should strive to make our worship services the best that our hearts and minds can produce, he has published a steady outpouring of prayers, poems, meditations and reflections of the highest quality, widely used, by ministers, lay worship leaders and many more, here and in many parts of the world. Also, there are hymns by Cliff to be found in all the hymnals published in Britain during his time in the ministry.

In addition, there have been significant writings on Michael Servetus, Charles Darwin, Charles Dickens and Beatrix Potter. There have been articles in all the Unitarian journals and magazines, and when Cliff writes to *The Inquirer* – everybody reads what he has to say!

There is much more that could be said. This is not a *significant* contribution, nor a *considerable* contribution, this is an *outstanding* contribution, *ample* – *more* than ample to justify bestowing upon him the denomination's highest honour.

I trust you will all support and vote in favour of this motion which I hereby second.

The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

Muddling through, or leading?

By Bill Darlison

Dr Ralph Waller, Principal of Harris Manchester College, Oxford, at which venerable Unitarian foundation some of our ministers are educated, gave a consistently interesting and entertaining talk which was part memoir, part reading list, and part advice to those who find themselves with the unenviable task of guiding businesses and churches through the complexities and problems presented by the modern world.

He began with a story about a visiting preacher in an American church who noticed that one grim-faced member of the congregation was toting a shotgun. At the end of the service the man with the gun approached a very worried looking preacher. 'Relax' he said. 'The bullet isn't for you, it's for the man who invited you!'

Man of many jobs

Dr Waller told us that his father died when he was young, that he failed his 11-plus exam, left school at 16 to work in a solicitor's office, trained as a teacher, taught in India, became a Methodist minister, completed a PhD, moved to a big church in Newcastle, taught theology at Westminster College, and eventually became Principal of Harris Manchester College. Throughout the vicissitudes of his long and varied career he has become convinced that even from disappointment and failure, something worthwhile can come. It is important in all life's circumstances to live with a sense of gratitude.

He gave as one of his major influences Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), whose book *My Life and Thought* he read when he was 16, and which set him on the road to a career in the church. Another influence was the liberal German theologian and philosopher, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who taught him about the connection between religion and experience, and who, while recognising the human propensity for wickedness, was also conscious of the original goodness of human beings, and of our remarkable capacity for self-sacrifice. Dr Waller told us that he had a special interest in Unitarian theologian, James Martineau, on whose life and thought he had written his PhD thesis. He was impressed by Martineau's approach to ethics, by his achievement as a liturgist, and by his prayers which are still worth reading today. During his studies, he came to realise that sometimes stories can convey profound truth better than history and that through the mirror of narrative we can encounter the divine.

True secret to church growth

Seamlessly – and humorously – woven into these theological reflections, was some very useful advice for those who are trying to manage churches. The secret of growth in a church community, he said, is not preaching, but love and care. He mentioned that one thoughtless minister of his acquaintance lost a family to his church by not turning up to a birthday party for which a cake had been specially baked for him. He emphasised that the minister or church leader should visit members of the congregation regularly, get to know their names, and should become known in the locality by regularly using neighbourhood shops and garages. When making hospital visits, the minister should make a point of talking to people on the ward who were not members of his/her congregation, and he/she should always try to cultivate 'ecumenical friends' among members of other churches.



Dr Ralph Waller gives the Keynote Address. Photos above and on page 7 by Molly Ramsey

Avoid 'false savings'

All people in leadership roles need to realise that one never stops learning, that one learns even as one teaches, and that graduation is not the end of one's education but the beginning. It is vitally important to listen to others and also to offer one's unique talents. He quoted the motto of King Henry III of England (1207-1272) *qui non dat quod habet, non accipit ille quod optat* ('He who will not give what he has does not receive what he wants'). Leaders must always strive to appoint the best people available and, sadly, at times they must be prepared to remove those people who are unsuited to a particular task. 'False savings' – cutting corners and penny pinching – are counterproductive, because they can destroy morale and leave people with a sense of defeat and impending doom. Vision and persistence are necessary, as is a readiness to adapt to circumstances. He said that Oxford and Cambridge have maintained their position among the best universities in the world for centuries by a willingness to renew themselves constantly.

He ended by reminding us that you never know for sure what people are thinking. He told the story of a college which wanted to increase the numbers attending morning communion by changing the time from 7 am to 7.30 am. But, instead of increasing, numbers declined. 'What's going on?' the chaplain asked one of the students. 'We thought that 7.30 would be a more acceptable time, giving the students an extra half-hour in bed.'

'Well,' said the student, 'We find it hard to stay up till 7, but staying awake till 7.30 is virtually impossible!'

Dr Waller's talk was one of the highlights of a GA which was studied with highlights.

The Rev Bill Darlison is a retired Unitarian minister.

ICUU faces challenges of modern world

By Celia Midgley

The International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) leaders Steve Dick with Jill McAllister were, as they say, a hard act to follow. With their very different but complementary styles of leadership, they steered ICUU through challenging and rewarding years of growth.

Now Steve's successor, Sara Ascher (*photo, right*), a Unitarian Universalist minister from Framingham, Massachusetts, seven months in post as ICUU Executive Director, is already immersed in the task and clearly loving it! A lively presence at the GA Meetings and at the Ministers' Conference which preceded the Meetings, Sara stressed over and over the importance of the global liberal religious presence which is the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists.

Sara reminded us that our General Assembly is one of the 27 member groups of that make up ICUU, meeting biennially in council and conference. *Save the Date* proclaimed the leaflets advertising the next gathering, to be held in Shillong, India from 11-15 February 2018, hosted by our friends in the Khasi and Jainta Hills. Keynote speakers will share with us their liberal faith stances and challenge us to 'bridge the differences of our faith expressions in order to become a stronger, more united voice for religious freedom in our world.' As well as



much talking, there will be fun and laughter, worship and celebration and many moments of inspiration and learning.

In her short time in post, Sara has travelled widely, most especially in Africa where she visited South Africa, Rwanda and Kenya. We learned of the depleted Burundi congregation struggling to hold on following violence and the imprisonment of their leader Fulgence Ndagijimana. His eventual release owed much to the world liberal religious community. Fulgence is now training for

ministry in Canada, whilst also holding office as ICUU vice president. Other Executive Committee members are from the USA, Transylvania, India, Germany, Switzerland and Canada.

New challenges have arisen since the early days of ICUU. English is the agreed common language, but the emergence of member groups in Africa gave rise to a Francophone grouping. Training for ministry has had to take account of cultural needs and be more localised. The Czechs have recently held an academy for training of religious leaders. There are groups under the ICUU umbrella which do not have the 'U' or 'U' name but they still belong. They all do. Large and small, the 27 member groups scattered across the globe become one loving body in ICUU and, we hope and pray, a force for good in the world.

The Rev Celia Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

New 'Identity Statement' is a Next Step

By Nicky Jenkins

This is part of the General Assembly's 'Next Steps' project to get us and who we are more widely known: 'growing the Unitarian Movement through a strengthened identity'. Robert Ince introduced Kate Eden who, after 20 years in advertising, had a change of heart and worked for Cancer Research before taking on our project. After reading our background material, Kate started to attend her local Unitarian chapel.

Apparently the 'Identity Statement' is used by all successful brands. During a short 40-minute slot at the Annual Meetings, Kate galloped through the process she had followed.

I'm hoping to see a print version in the future because I couldn't take notes quickly enough. She seems to have grasped the essence of Unitarianism and Free Christianity, though there are those who will, no doubt, feel there has been a lack of emphasis on their particular way of looking at their spirituality. The whole point of the exercise is to hone down our image to encapsulate our movement and you really can't do that by saying, 'Oh and don't forget to mention this group, that activity, etc.'

This is what she has come up with:

- Who are we? *Those who seek spiritual growth and a chance to build a better world.*
- Beliefs? *Vibrant diversity, spiritual growth, social justice.*
- Purpose? *Unite in creating a spiritually enriched fairer world.*
- Essence? *Love and Justice.*

- Mission? *To nurture a radically inclusive community that heals, challenges and enriches.*
- Then the question 'If Unitarianism was a person what would its character be?' *Enquiring, compassionate, energising.*
- What resources do we provide? *A vibrant community that acts for positive change on a personal level and in the wider community; encounters that enrich the spirit.*

For me, one of the more striking elements of her research was 'Words matter!' In order to communicate we need to use words which don't have a specialist meaning. Imagine you had never been to a church before. What are we doing? Singing songs. She had a whole, wonderful, table of alternative vocabulary for those of us who have forgotten that we learned a special lingo when we became part of a church community. Another example is the use of 'Guide-parents' in place of Godparents.

Visual identity proved to be a much more contentious area of the presentation. Kate built on the chalice design from the consistent identity project but suggested we kept to Yellow as a main logo. Under this there would be a purple Chalice for Christian identity; Universalists, orange; Free thinkers, blue and Earth Spirit green.

The audience thought this missed the point of our diverse, mixed congregations and ended up putting ideas in boxes. Some congregations had done their own rebranding and didn't want to start again.

Feedback was welcomed and the project continues.

The Rev Nicky Jenkins is minister at York.



Come and walk with us on

This year's marvellous General Assembly opening ceremony was full of singing and drama – a piece written by the award-winning writer Dylan Iorwerth and performed by a large Welsh chorus, it was about the hardships faced by Welsh Unitarians as they fought for their right to worship freely. There were many ideas especially appropriate for today. Here are some highlights.

The chorus began with singing.

The flame that was lit long ago was a light in the darkness,

The chalice of hope that our ancestors followed with pride;

Lighting their steps towards reason and freedom and fairness,

To break down the gates of injustice, with truth at their side.

Wyn Thomas played the character Edward Williams, better known in Wales as Iolo Morganwg, a Unitarian who calls himself the 'Bard of Liberty'. He led the ensemble onto the stage and said:

'We've all travelled here close to one of the lode-stone places of Unitarianism ... we've come from all parts of the nations of Britain and far beyond ... all of us coming from homes warm with tradition through all weathers, with our own little knapsacks on our backs ... it's a symbol of all our journeys to search for all our truths. We've travelled this far and now we must travel further ... will you join us in walking on...?'

As Iolo and the chorus walk on, they meet some of the people who shaped Unitarianism.

'Did you ever hear Richard Price preaching at Newington Green in London? Did you hear him plead the rights of women ... not just

the rights of man? And did you hear his famous sermon to celebrate the centenary of the Glorious Revolution? There are times when intolerance grows, when suspicion and xenophobia breed and ... gave "A Discourse on the Love of One's Country".'

Richard Price: 'Why are the nations of the world so patient of despotism? Why do they crouch to tyrants, and submit to be treated as if they were a herd of cattle? Is it not because they are kept in darkness and want knowledge? Enlighten them and you will enlighten them...'

'An enlightened and virtuous country must be a free country. It will not suffer invasions of its rights or bend to tyrants. Adulation is always odious and when offered to men in power, it corrupts ... and it debases those that offer it...'

Iolo moves on to Aberdare and a story of oppression.

Tomos Glyn Cothi: I was jailed. Me, a weaver and a miner ... I was jailed, for singing a song making fun of the king ... now I have sung some wild things in my time; but it wasn't true this time ... they found two of my enemies to testify against me and ignore the evidence of four honourable men who spoke on my behalf. Even a Unitarian didn't help. Two years in Carmarthen jail leaving my business behind and my looms all deadly quiet. I got two turns in the pillory too ... for all the world to make fun of me ... or that was the idea...

Tomos goes on: You must have heard of what happened in Merthyr in 1831 ... the great rising of the workers. And the Unitarians ...



journey of Unitarian faith

... listen to what the historian Gwyn Alf Williams says about the area, starting with the rural days and then moving on to the industrial maelstrom: 'The three Unitarian congregations were small, more than 50 members each. They were, however, distinctive. Mathematics, astronomy, applied science and music of quality were in session. Benjamin Saunders, master-moulder at Cyfarthfa, built his own planetarium and made a quadrant, a thermometer and water clock; Morgan Davies, a self-educated collier, expounded Priestley's chemistry to his apprentice. While Jones of Baptist Ebenezer was being hooted in the streets for trying to introduce hymns into the chapel, Unitarian Cefn had its own string orchestra.'

Following the election of 1868, when Welsh farmers stood up against their Tory masters, the Squire of Alltirodyn took his revenge by barring the Unitarians from their chapel, until they sacked their minister Gwilym Marles.

Gwilym Marles: 'We gather, friends, on the road outside our own chapel, the gate to the House of the Lord is barred against us; a padlock and chains stop us from visiting the graves of our ancestors and loved ones. If we turn our backs on our principles and forsake the gates, the gates will open again; if you forsake me, the padlock chains will be broken.'

His wife, Mary Williams takes up the story.

Mary Williams: 'The people didn't give in. We worshipped for a while in a small wooden building on the hillside looking down at our chapel and then we collected money for a brand new build-

ing nearby. The donations flowed in from all parts of Britain and beyond. Within three years, our new spiritual home was ready. But those events took their toll ... Gwilym was too ill to be present at the first service ... in less than two months he was dead.'

The lessons of Unitarian history were brought into the present, with testimony from today's oppressed. A refugee, an LGBT representative, a homeless person and a Welsh one, fighting for the language. All spoke of their challenges.

Hymn-writer **Jacob Dafis** offered this: 'For me, you see, being Welsh and Unitarian were always one and the same. It was justice and freedom ... for my culture to be allowed to take its place alongside all other cultures, for the workers in those tough industries to enjoy the fruits of their labour, for liberty that doesn't mean oppressing others, for all people to be free to follow their consciences ... all people. We may be a small country, but that may be one contribution we can make.'

Amidst much singing and some laughs, it was a wonderful way to open the General Assembly Annual meetings.

Consider this exchange: *Dilys:* Are you going to throw some eggs (at a Unitarian on the pillory)? *Doris:* No, Dilys fach, I come from Cardiganshire, I don't waste eggs. *Doris:* You know the funny thing is. I thought they were Unitarian. *Dilys:* They are Doris. *Doris:* But they can't be. They look exactly like us...

Photo above of the delegates to the 2017 Annual Meetings by John Hewerdine. See Opening Ceremony photo on page 16.

Be welcoming, but don't say 'chalice'

By Elizabeth Smith

Derby Unity, currently based at the Multi-Faith Centre in Derby, is a unique and growing community breaking new ground by reaching out to people of all faiths and specifically to those with no religious beliefs. One of the things we know from the last census is that the proportion of respondents who say they have no religious beliefs rose from 15% in 2001 to 25% in 2011 – that rise represents 14.1 million people.

DU's aim is to attract people who would not normally engage with a religious community and create a safe space for them to explore the deepest and highest aspects of their humanity. Their central mission is: 'We gather with the aim of creating a powerful example of peaceful community for the 21st Century.'

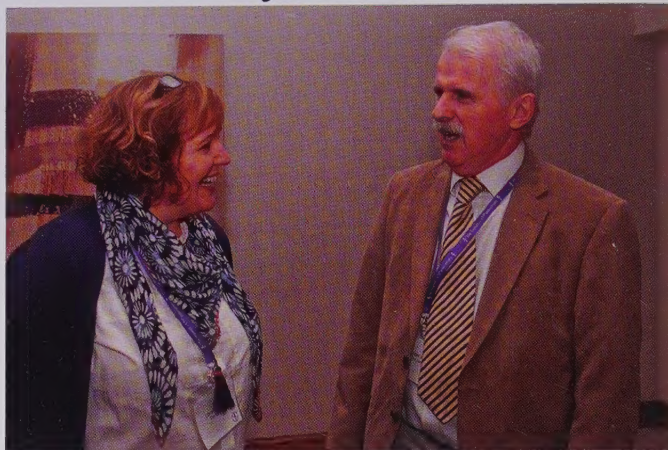
At the Unitarian General Assembly meetings, Christina Smith, who is the chief community cultivator for DU, gave an update on the project since its launch 18 months ago and a shortened sample gathering on the topic of 'Life, Love and Letting go'.

Christina began by acknowledging the Derby Unitarians who have fully supported this project, the East Midland District and the East Midland congregations who have been a source of strength and inspiration, the 2020 Leadership Team and the Unitarian General Assembly's Executive Committee who have also fully supported this project. During the workshop, Christina took everyone through what you could expect to happen at a DU gathering. DU is set up 'café style' with 'breakfast bites' and drinks available throughout; opening words and the lighting of a candle (not a chalice); a story for all ages; a good news story (normally in the form of a video); a theme talk; silent candles of joys, concerns and thanksgivings; a question from the question jar to start conversation during coffee time; songs (not hymns); a quote of the week and closing words.

The group was invited to look deeper into their own and society's preconceived idea of love and forgiveness. Christina showed the group an insightful video, which illustrated that love has no labels and no limits, love, has no gender, disability, race or religion; we sang songs, listened to poetry. Tory Glinwell read the story for all ages which was 'Worm loves Worm' and there was an inspirational real life story of forgiveness in the form of a short video.

Christina concluded with a theme talk explaining that bitterness and love cannot live together in the same heart and each day we must decide which one gets to stay. Love is love. It does not matter if that love is towards a partner, a friend, a parent, a child, a colleague, a stranger or even an enemy – when we put love at the centre of everything we do, it changes us and in turn that changes the world. Loving and being loved should not be limited but limitless.

Since its launch DU has welcomed 58 newcomers over their threshold and have just fewer than 50% of those return more than once a month. The numbers attending last year after just 6 months were between 9-16 and this year they are between 13-22, which is a 37% increase. Bear in mind these are people who have never engaged with religious communities or who have avoided them. The 2020 group and the DU team have taken a lot of risks to try and discover what gets people interested in becoming part of a community. Not all of them have paid off and it has been a long process full of learning curves, but in Christina's words 'whether we win or lose we will learn something. We will learn how to connect with people and build strong new communities.' How can you go wrong with that?



Christina Smith, chief community cultivator at Derby Unity, chats with EC Convenor Robert Ince. Photo by James Barry

So, long story short, the 2020 Leadership Team's goal is to support the development of new and renewed congregations without diverting funding and resources from existing congregations. Derby Unity is their first 'fully funded' project and may well just be the way we can make our wonderful liberal community relevant to the fastest growing sector of the population. See the DU website: www.derbyunity.org or follow on social media: Instagram – [derbyunity](#);

Twitter – [@DerbyUnity](#); Facebook – [Derby Unity](#)

Notice

General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

CO-OPTION OF THREE MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee is seeking applications for three co-opted members to serve from July 2017 until the end of the Annual Meetings in April 2019.

Applicants should demonstrate 3 years active commitment to the Unitarian community, be in sympathy with the Objects of the General Assembly and be eligible to stand in accordance with legal requirements for charity trusteeship.

Essential Requirements:

- (1) Experience in one or other of the following:
 - As an officer or member of a congregational/district governing body, a committee of an affiliated body or of a charity trustee body or similar eg voluntary organisations such as a sports club or PTA.
 - As a Minister, Lay Pastor, Approved Lay Leader or Lay Person in Charge of a Unitarian congregation.
- (2) Good understanding of the Unitarian community.
- (3) Confidentiality.

A trustee skills audit has been undertaken which has shown that the new EC would benefit from members with knowledge and skills in the following areas:

- Diversity
- Skills and Competency assessment
- Working with young people

We would also like to strengthen the EC in the following areas:

- Faith and spirituality
- Marketing, media, PR and campaigning
- Finance and Fundraising

Those interested should contact Derek McAuley, GA Chief Officer at dmcauley@unitarian.org.uk for further information. Applicants should complete the application form and declaration and return to Mary-Jean Hennis Mhennis@unitarian.org.uk by 12.00noon on Friday 12 May 2017 to enable consideration by the Executive Committee at their meeting on 19/20 May 2017.

Derek McAuley
Chief Officer

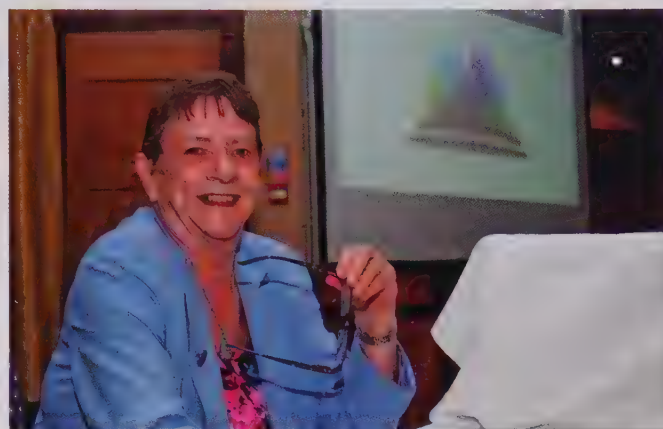
Panel: Publish and be...advised!

By David Dawson

The Lindsey Press panel is primarily focused on producing books that will be of value to the Unitarian movement as a whole. In general these are books that enhance awareness of Unitarian principles, address contemporary issues, and provide resources for Unitarian worship. There is however recognition that there are other publishing needs within the Unitarian movement that are equally important, but perhaps of more local interest. To support this area of Unitarian publishing the Lindsey Press produced, many years ago, a short guide – *How to Publish your Work*. Kay Millard was the author of that guide; she has now thoroughly revised it to take account of the enormous changes that computers and technology in general has brought to publishing.

The new *How to Publish your Work* was formally launched with an illustrated presentation by Kay at the GA 2017 Annual Meetings. The sixteen page booklet (A4 size) was available in hard copy at the meetings – but it is intended as an online resource and will now only be available by downloading from the GA website.

What might a 'local' publication be? Some suggestions: a collection of prayers and/or poems with various contributors



Kay Millard's guide to publishing is now available online.
Photo by James Barry

from a congregation or district, histories of a chapel and its congregation, a biography of a significant local person or family, a recipe book to raise funds. You can probably think of other ideas.

Having an idea for a publication is the easy bit; this guide takes the reader through the many steps and the hard work that will be necessary to achieve a successful publication. In publishing there are areas where there are clear rules to follow, for example in copyright, preliminary information; and there are areas where some flexibility is possible, for example in choice of typeface, and when to use italics and bold. In all aspects of publishing, consistency is absolutely critical. This guide to publishing has frequent references to websites for further information.

Kay examines the process of preparing the manuscript, aiming for 'as close to perfect as is humanly possible' and considers issues such as copyright, bibliographies, references and indexing. Perhaps the two key questions to ask yourself are 'is what you have written clear to the reader?' ... and 'is the work a coherent whole, moving logically from introduction to conclusion?' You may think that you can answer these questions, but it is suggested that an independent reader is probably better placed to proof read and make suggestions on style and content.

And so to 'Final Preparations' – including the matter of page design. A local printer can, from your manuscript, do the page design and produce proof copies. There will be a charge for this service. Costs can be kept down by producing 'camera ready' design. (All the pages – music and words- for *Sing Your Faith* were sent to the printer as 'camera ready' pages with a considerable cost saving.)

An attractive cover design and title will help to sell the publication. Finding a snappy title that reflects the subject of the book is not always easy – the use of a subtitle to give more precise information about the book can be a useful device.

The Canadian communications guru Marshall McLuhan said in 1977: 'Gutenberg made everybody a reader; Xerox makes everybody a publisher'. Today he would replace Xerox with computers and online technology. *How to Publish your Work* will help you to avoid the many pitfalls that await the unwary. The final result is available online here: <http://bit.ly/2oMB3cy> This guide will enable you to translate your good idea into a quality publication.

David Dawson is a member of the Lindsey Press Panel.

Break out the bells and sticks!



The Earth Spirit Network brought Morris Dancing to the GA. James Barry (centre, in hat) taught enthusiastic participants the ancient ways. Photo by Molly Ramsey

Renewal Group offers Unitarian chants

By John Midgley

The question is often asked, 'What is the Unitarian Renewal Group?' It is a 'ginger group', has more than 70 members and has been in existence for more than 40 years. During that time, it has sought to renew and 'ginger up' the Unitarian movement in various ways.

It has consistently promoted the idea of inclusivity, encouraging congregations to be welcoming and positively inclusive towards the many varieties of Unitarian that we have, not just offer single-strand Unitarianism. It has also challenged staleness in congregational life and worship, that is, just doing something 'because that's the way we've always done it.'

URG has done this through promoting ideas, discussions, and activities at day gatherings, study courses and more. URG created the widely used *Building Your Own Theology* (UK version) and *Building Our Identity*. A particular area of concern has been the worship life of our congregations. In the past, URG has collaborated with the now (alas) defunct Worship Committee which existed to study worship and promote new and creative forms. URG has also laid on some splendid presentations at GA Annual Meetings.

So, when it was learned that there was a growing interest in the singing of new, simple, modern chants in our services, URG



planners decided on a session to introduce some of these to attendees. David Kent (*photo, left*) is a talented musician and composer who has produced *The Chalice Meditations*, a collection of sung meditations, with music, and with words provided by Unitarian ministers from all parts of the UK. A happy crowd of singers gathered to share some of these under his leadership, with the experienced hands of David Dawson at the piano. To some, this might seem like the

introduction of a 'happy-clappy' style into our services, and sure enough the meditations sometimes include some rhythmic clapping. But this is not a takeover by an evangelical wing of Unitarianism. It is more of an endeavour to ginger up and refresh our worship.

Sharing these simple meditations has the advantage of being suitable for large or small congregations, and those without an organist or pianist available. They were well received in this meeting and are catching on all over the country.

See: www.misterdavidkent.com/ChaliceMeditations.aspx or <http://bit.ly/2peu8dm>.

This event gave us a glimpse into a new element of future Unitarian worship. But don't worry. The ginger is flavoursome but not too hot!

The Rev John Midgley is a member of the URG.

Historical Society hears about archives

By Alan Ruston

The annual meeting of the Unitarian Historical Society was quickly completed under the able direction of the President, the Rev Daniel Costley. The passing of two stalwarts of Unitarian history research, the Rev Dr Leonard Smith and John Goodchild was reported with regret. Concern was expressed that the interim recommendations of the committee reviewing the future of the GA annual meetings had proposed that the time allotted to sectional events like ours should be limited to one hour. If this proposal is accepted it's likely to mean that the society could not hold the AGM and have a speaker as well.

A well-attended gathering heard an informative talk by Sue Killoran, who for the last 16 years has been the Librarian at Harris Manchester College Oxford. She outlined what had been done in recent times to extend the library and its archives. A new gallery had been erected to cater for the 225 students who study there; it's now possible to record how many separate visits are made to the Library; in the last year it was over 40,000.

Sue then described what she saw as the main challenges facing keepers of records. The need to record and box archived items, and to keep the material safe from fire, water damage and theft was paramount.

She emphasised this is important if we are to maintain what has been handed down to us, and by keeping it safe for the future we become part of the history that we cherish. A serious subject touched with humour when she recalled items that archives get given, such as the jaw bone of a crocodile. But the careless visitor can be a problem who could damage important

documents which made librarians conclude that 'if nobody touched anything it would be wonderful.'

There were considerable resources in the College library for those researching Unitarian history, some of which are being digitalised. She mentioned the manuscript catalogue, in particular an obituaries index held at the College which gives the page reference for the obituaries which have appeared in Unitarian journals from the 1790s to date; this consists of over 30,000 references and can be seen on line at www.unitarianobituaries.org.uk.

In conclusion Sue said that if a congregation was wanting to donate its records the first port of call should be the local record office who can give appropriate advice. Altogether a well-presented and challenging address on a potentially dry subject, made the more interesting by a lively presentation.

Alan Ruston is a Unitarian historian.

Situation Vacant

Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, Manchester

Resident Full-time Chapel-keeper
and Business Manager

Also, a part-time assistant

Starting: 25 September 2017

Closing date for applications: 31 July

Two referees required

Interviews from 25 August

Details from: Cross Street Unitarian Chapel,
Cross Street, Manchester M2 1NL

Or, email: peterwsampson38@gmail.com

Belief in life after death is a comfort

By Lesley Harris

The title of the talk sponsored by the Unitarian Psychical Society at the Unitarian General Assembly meetings was 'The Medium and The Minister: who on earth knows about an afterlife?' It was given by Dr Roger Straughan, author and reader in education, University of Reading.

Roger began by going through some reasons for believing in a life after death, and for not believing in a life after death. The non-believers would claim that there is no proof and what is the point of thinking about life after death anyway when we should be concentrating our energies on this life. Believers would point out that all religions include a generalised belief in some sort of afterlife and that many people have seen ghosts, had out-of-body experiences, have heard voices and have felt presences. These beliefs and experiences pre-date Christianity by many thousands of years, surely some of them must derive from real happenings. Spiritualists are convinced that mediums can communicate with the so-called dead. Psychical researchers have had a long history of investigating this issue. Some psychologists do not believe that our minds are actually connected to our bodies.

Roger considered to what extent religious doctrines could answer our questions about an afterlife and suggested that the response of religion to this question had perhaps been inadequate, despite many references to the afterlife in the Bible, for example St Paul's quote, 'We shall not sleep'. Indeed conventional religion had sometimes been hostile to Spiritualism and to psychical researchers, since their work meant that mainstream religious priests could no longer be the sole authorities on life after death and they could no longer be the sole intermediaries between their congregations and the next world. Roger added that the current decline in religious beliefs had *not* been accompanied by a decline in a belief of an afterlife.

Roger also raised the question, 'What is the point of believing in an afterlife?' He suggested that if you think that there is an afterlife, you might be more likely to reject a completely materialistic view of life, and take up a more spiritual path. A belief in an afterlife helps shape our attitude to the world, the person we become and the way we behave. If we believe in some sort of afterlife then death is not so much to be feared. He added that it is a mistake to be obsessive about proof.

Roger described the outpouring of after-life investigations that began in the mid 19th century, firstly in Hydesville, USA, with the Fox sisters who heard rappings in their house and who communicated with a former pedlar who had been murdered nearby. Investigations continued. The British Society for Psychical Research and its American counterpart were established and much importance was placed on the evidence of mediums and mediumship. Major figures in this research were Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge who gave a message of hope to mourners, particularly during the First World War, when the mainstream churches were lacking in this regard. Many ordinary people had psychical experiences which could not be reconciled with Christianity or any other mainstream religion.

Roger ended his talk by recommending Professor David Fontana's book *Is there an afterlife?*.

There then followed an interesting and heartfelt discussion from the audience. One participant described how the Spiritualist Church in the deprived area where she lived was giving a real message of hope. Another remarked that even if the readings from some mediums were sometimes general and unconvincing, the Spiritualist Church gave real guidance and help to anyone who came in off the street and that she herself was a better person for attending Spiritualist Church services. An older participant briefly described an out of body experience he had had, saying he would remember it for the rest of his life. Another described attending a séance which had obviously been fraudulent. However the same gentleman had also been to a medium who had been able to describe accurately everything he had done in the past two weeks. He also remembered how his mother, just before dying, had suddenly sat up, completely out of the blue, with recognition in her eyes and said 'Hello' to someone nobody else could see, and having done that, then passed away. This last experience gave him a gut feeling that there must be some sort of afterlife.

There appeared to be general agreement that, despite some unconvincing experiences and questionable evidence, there was a good fighting chance that an afterlife exists.

For more information on the Unitarian Psychical Society see: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/psychical/home.htm

Lesley Harris is a member of Oat Street Chapel, Evesham.



There was marvellous music at the Annual Meetings. Catherine Coyne (left) played during the Anniversary Service, which was led by Daniel Costley. The scratch choir, led by David Dawson sang beautifully. Photos: Molly Ramsey (left), John Hewerdine





Unitarian General Assembly 2017





This year's Opening Ceremony was a drama with songs presented by Welsh Unitarians. The Rev Wyn Thomas (centre) played Iolo Morganwg, a Unitarian who calls himself the 'Bard of Liberty'. While the content was mainly historical, images of modern oppression flashed up on the screen behind the players. Excerpts from the play text appear on page 8. Photo by John Hewerdine

Successful year for the Women's League

By Margaret Hill

The Women's League held their AGM during the Assembly Meetings, presided over by WL President Janet Poole of Bank Street Chapel, Bolton. The meeting opened with the hymn *There is a place I call my own*.

The Women's League had fundraised over the past year for the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS). A cheque for £9,000 was presented by 5-year old Maisie Barry, who has cochlear implants (her magic ears) and whose family has benefited from NDCS, and President Janet Poole to Hanna Sturman, representing NDCS. Hanna spoke briefly of how this money would help.

The secretary and treasurer gave reports and the accounts showed a healthy balance. An amendment to the constitution was agreed. Three branches have closed during the year. A successful rally had been held in October at Hinsley Hall, Leeds, with Rosemary Frances from the Leeds congregation giving a talk. This year's rally will be at Luther King House, Manchester. Joy Foster was thanked for producing the *League Letter*, Sheena Bluer was thanked for being Memorial Fund Treasurer for a number of years. Barbara Clifford has become the new Memorial Fund Treasurer, Mary Wightman has compiled an album of photographs of past presidents. Judy Hague had the Memorial Book on show.

WL President Janet Poole spoke of visiting branches all over the country, and of the warm welcome she received. Three members of the WL committee were invited to meet member of the General; Assembly Executive committee at Essex Hall, to speak about the history of the League, the fundraising for charity, and a WL link to the G.A. website.

The officers were re-elected. Out-going president Janet Poole presented the President's badge of office to the Rev Celia Cartwright, president for 2017/8, and Celia presented Anne Gemmell with the Vice President badge.

The new President introduced the speaker Peter Woodward, a volunteer speaker from Prostate Cancer UK, which is the Women's League's fundraising project for 2017/18. Peter



Maisie Barry, 5, and then-president of the Women's League Janet Poole (right) present a cheque for £9000 to Hanna Sturman of the NDCS. Photo by Molly Ramsey

talked about prostate cancer, which only men have, showed slides and distributed leaflets. One anonymous male writer in *GAZette* thanked the Women's League for choosing this charity! The Welsh ladies had brought lots of knitted penguins, each with an Easter egg on their feet, to sell on the W.L. stall to start off the fundraising – appropriate as Maisie Barry's uncle once spent two years on a sub-Antarctic island with thousands of penguins!

President Celia Cartwright closed the meeting with some thoughts and a prayer, and the hymn *Let it be a dance we do*.

Margaret Hill is a member of the Women's League.